

Hollow Day

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Angst, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Astrid, Hiccup

Status: Completed

Published: 2012-06-11 07:17:19

Updated: 2012-06-11 07:17:19

Packaged: 2016-04-26 13:32:03

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 6,616

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: It was tradition, something that Astrid had taken very seriously up until quite recently. 'To Hel with tradition', he smiled, kissing her gently her on the forehead. Part VII of The Horizons Saga.

Hollow Day

Hello everyone! Here comes part seven of ****The Horizons Saga****!
Enjoy!

For those of you just tuning in, I highly recommend you at least read a couple of the preceding stories if you want to understand what on earth is going on. ****Horizons**** is a biggie, but I promise you that it's worth it.

Also, have you read ****Catch and Release**** yet? You probably should :)

* * *

><p>Hollow Day

Gone is the terror of the sea,

But know that one and two make threeâ€|

* * *

><p>Perched behind a statue on the sloped roof of the Great Hall, Astrid's lips curled into a smirk as Hiccup was dragged off by shell of his ear like the petulant child that he was; her great aunt Gothi shared a similar facial expression as she hauled the protesting renegade rider behind her, ignoring his indignant cries for mercy.<p>

Scaling off of the enormous building with increasing ease, Astrid made to follow the mismatched pair to their ultimate destination as covertly as she could manage. She had a good idea more or less as to why he was been targeted by the village seer " he had stolen one of her priceless atlases, after all " but she still couldn't quite shake the feeling that this impromptu capture might just rear some of the answers to her vastly growing list of questions. She swung from the nearest tree branch onto the next roof and ran across the wooden shingles like a shadow across the sun, keeping her eyes peeled on her targets.

Slipping down the length of an eaves trough, Astrid landed deftly on a window ledge and leapt onto the next house. Briefly, she glanced over towards the western horizon to catch a glimpse of the churning storm clouds brewing there; shaking her head, she quickly reminded herself to focus on the task at hand, which was to collect as much information as possible from the two of them and then escape unnoticed. She thought she could do it; she'd been spending the past week being as clandestine as she possibly could, especially since her mother had banished her inside the house since she had set foot on the island ten days ago. Every night she had been sneaking out of second floor bedroom window to taste some of her long lost freedom, whilst doing some covert research of her own while she was at it. She'd been trying to find a way into the vaults beneath her great aunt's house for days to find some sort of closure, but she still hadn't been able to find the exterior entryway. Frustrated, but still dying for some answers, Astrid had been settling for the books she had found locked in a chest in her attic in hopes that they could shine a light on something "anything" that could help her with the situation at hand.

Nobody knew of course, not even Hiccup. She reasoned with herself that she would tell him what she was up to eventually, once she had finally found something worth repeating; she could tell he was a little worried about how tired she looked, although she knew he would never explicitly come out and say it. He knew how much she needed things left unsaid, and throughout their voyage across the foreign seas she was pretty sure he had come to accept it.

Hiccup tripped up as he fought to keep his equilibrium going up some stairs, and the Elder released his ear only to snatch it back up in her deceptively strong fingers once he was back on his feet. He cringed as he hobbled off behind her, head wrenched uncomfortably to one side, and Astrid continued her pursuit across the tops of the trees and the houses to stay out of sight.

Her mother had let her out of the house unaccompanied for the first time that day under pretence that she was going to go fill the water buckets at the common well. Astrid smirked a little, knowing full well that fetching water was the last thing she planned on doing. In her head, she dared her mother to just try and go after her; if she still had had her dragon, she would have already left this place and been long gone by now.

Faltering, Astrid tripped over a raised shingle and skidded as she landed, ripping her leggings and skinning her knee. Cursing, she leapt to her feet and fled as fast as she could, thinking herself a moron for letting her Nadder's death affect her so much; she had sworn to stop showing her emotions, specifically her grief in light of her companion's passing. She thought she had been fine, healing

even, until they had come back to Berk. Then everyone had been flying and having fun with their dragons, and she had been left with nothing. She had never felt so isolated in her entire life, even counting the weeks when she had been the only human within a hundred leagues in the Western seas. She felt deserted, lonely, alone...she hated feeling alone.

When they had both come back to Berk, everything had gone to Hel.

She hated admitting it, even to herself, but even the little things were starting to get the best of her. She was stir crazy from being locked inside every day and all she wanted was to run for hours and hours until she was so exhausted she could barely stand. Maybe then would she be so distracted by her aching legs and burning lungs that she wouldn't feel, and everything would be normal again.

Astrid paused on the threshold of a rooftop and willed herself to get a grip.

She wanted her dragon back. She wanted her freedom back. But most of all, she wanted her normal life back. She wanted to pall around with all of her friends again, flying through the village on their dragons. She wanted people to start praising her on her fighting skills again and stop asking her about her stupid adventure. She wanted Hiccup back to the way he used to be, when he shoveled all of his feelings down inside of him because now he was like an open book to her with his haunted eyes and his worried expressions. Their trip had changed him drastically, both mentally and physically, and in her heart of hearts Astrid realized that their journey just might have changed her too.

Staring down at him as the elder and her hostage rounded the corner of one of the busier streets, Astrid quickly assessed his appearance from above. He'd grown at least a head taller since the battle of the Red Death, which she had noticed quite dramatically while they had been on the Western seas. She'd had to crane her neck upwards just to make eye contact by the time she had finally caught up with him and she hadn't been able to rest her chin on his shoulder comfortably when she rode behind him on Toothless during their voyage home.

He had also grown a little bit of facial hair, which was miraculous as far as she was concerned. She should have known better than to doubt him, considering who his father was, but the mild speckling of hair dusting his chin was still a little surprising. She'd grown up with such a negative physical impression of him for so long that the very idea of him becoming something other than a boy still felt somewhat absurd, even despite all that she had learned of him now, so she still wasn't really sure whether she thought it suited him at all.

And he was still so incredibly skinny and lanky and scraggly, but her impressions of him were beginning to change. The most astonishing part of it all was the realization that he was hiding a deceptive amount of strength beneath his hunter green tunic and his riding harness. She'd seen him use it to his full potential only occasionally, but she wished he would show it off more often...she didn't even want to admit why. She was too angry right then to think about anything, let alone confessions of love.

Gothi was nearly at the front steps to her home when Astrid was forced to clamber down the side of the building she was currently perched on in order to keep up. She planned on sneaking into her great aunt's house somehow, although she didn't exactly have a very specific plan in place in order to accomplish it. Planning elaborate schemes was always Hiccup's job " she was never very good at it. In the meantime, Astrid scurried behind a boulder and waited until Gothi had ushered her servant girl home before skulking up to the porch, always keeping to the shadows.

Displaying an unexpected amount of force, the stooped elder dragged Hiccup through the entrance and shut the door behind her, stamping out Astrid's hopes of sneaking inside the home. Grumbling, she skirted around the side of the house with her back to the wooden siding, only to find a pair of open window panes at the rear of elder's lodge. Stifling back a victorious smirk, Astrid lowered herself into the nearby bushes beneath the window and waited as Hiccup and Gothi entered the main chamber.

"has come to no damage, I hope?"

Astrid heard the old crow's cane tap rhythmically along the floorboards as she neared the conveniently open window. Craning her neck closer to the noise, Astrid blessed her lucky stars as she waited for Hiccup's belated reply.

"Well, it's uh" it's just a little torn up around the edges but it's not that bad, I swear."

Gothi harrumphed, sitting herself down with a soft thud. Hiccup's prosthetic scraped closer as he too sat down somewhere in the general vicinity.

"I expect a perfect replica of the map you stole from me by laurdag of next week," she reprimanded and Astrid could only imagine that her great aunt was wagging a menacing finger at him. She let her lips turn up briefly at the mental image before dedicating all of her concentration back to the conversation above her, "However, it is not the map that I'm concerned about."

She heard Hiccup's prosthetic squeak painfully as she impatiently waited for him to answer; it felt like an eternity had passed before he finally spoke up, his voice wavering, "What"what do you mean?"

"I mean exactly what I mean child," she replied insistently, "I can forgive you for your thievery eventually, but I fear that some of your other exploits have garnered you less sympathy than you anticipated."

Astrid could practically hear him gulp as Gothi continued, "You've made quite a few enemies on your journey because of your rash behaviour. Did it ever occur to you the lives that you would be putting in danger? Besides your own? You've managed to miraculously condemn yourself and your dragon to certain death, but then you had to go and drag my great niece into the fold! What I want to know is how exactly, do you think you're going to escape now that you've lead the beasts straight to our island?"

Hiccup stuttered nervously as he tried to form a cohesive sentence,

"I-I don'tâ€¦I don't really know yet."

"Has it even occurred to you what kind of damage this could cause? You have practically escorted them straight into our homes Hiccup!" Gothi slammed her cane down harshly, startling Astrid enough to make her release the breath she didn't realize she'd been holding, "What in the nine worlds possessed you to think that you could kill the son of Loki and get away unscathed?"

Hiccup murmured something unintelligible from her location and Astrid swore silently, wishing he would just speak up. Her heart was pounding in her ears as her great aunt's accusations began to take shape in mind again, and at that point Astrid slowly started to realize the implications of what they had executed. They'd never really considered the scope, the sheer complexity of what they had done together; they had always been too busy trying to survive to understand. How her great aunt knew the details, she could only guess at, but more than anything she just wanted to try and help defend Hiccup from the elder's wrath. After all, it wasn't like he went looking to kill Jormungand â€" the giant snake chose him!

â€¦right?

Astrid waited on baited breath for her great aunt to continue, but her explanation never came.

"You can come out now daughter. I know you're out there."

Stunned, Astrid's heart skipped a beat; how in deepest pits of Hel had the old woman known she was out there? She stumbled to her feet, gazing wide-eyed in disbelief at her great aunt, whose wrinkled lips were caught between a scowl and a smug grin. The ancient seer snorted and waved to her to come closer and join them in the room before continuing her tirade, "You're a part of this just as much as he is now I'm afraid, no thanks to his recklessness."

Astrid stole a fleeting glance at Hiccup as she clambered through the open window, her eyes flitting back and forth between the agitated old seer and the ashen boy sitting across from her. He looked as if he'd just been taken over by a draugr, which immediately made her think back to the day where she had found his body washed up on the shore like a piece of driftwood. The vivid image in her mind made her shudder visibly and her heart sunk in her chest.

Taking a shaky, weak breath, Astrid sat down beside Hiccup much closer than she had originally intended, and from such a close proximity she could feel the heat from his body through his leggings as she brushed the outside of his thigh with her own. Her heart was still pounding in her chest as she privately relived those agonizing hours that she thought would be her last, their last.

"How...how do you know all this?" Astrid's voice shook dangerously as she spoke. Gothi, whose eyes were narrowed on the two of them, stared down the incline of her nose at her great niece with a mixture of mirth and exasperation.

"Every action, no matter how small, causes a reaction in the realms. The gods have given me the gift of the Sight and when the two of you left the isle of Berk for the unknown, I tried my hardest to follow

the signs that were presented to me. It wasn't hard, however, once the gods got involved."

If it was even possible, Hiccup paled even further, "The gods?"

"Of course child â€" do you truly think you could have slain a demi-god all on your own?" Gothi laughed, her tone decidedly skeptical, "The whole of _Yggdrasil_ was in an uproar when Jormungand finally commenced his attack on you. The gods placed their bets eagerly and chose sides on who would make it through alive, and most picked the serpent for obvious reasons, but there were some who gave you the benefit of the doubt. After all, you and your dragon managed to draw up quite the crowd when you single handedly brought down the Red Death to her knees, and so a few of the _Aesir_ decided to side with the underdog, if only to egg on their mischievous foe."

"Of course, the gods have never been particularly fond on the _j  tunns_, as you already know. Many wars have been fought between them over the past millennia, and since Loki himself is the very offspring of the founding parents of _J  tunnheim_, you can imagine that the gods didn't take very well to him eating and drinking in their halls. They tried their best to ignore his divine heritage for the sake of their own sanities, mind you â€" his mother Laufey was in fact a goddess â€" but he took to calling himself Loki Laufeyson while he visited the towers of Asgard just to flaunt it in their faces."

"Loki caused a lot of trouble in Asgard and ended up making quite a few enemies, as you can imagine. He was eventually cast out after nearly being killed by Thor â€" by this time, Loki had tried several times to seduce Sif, Thor's wife â€" and Odin had had enough of his deft manipulations. Left to his own devices, Loki visited the other eight worlds that remained open to him for the last age, leaving a trail of chaos in his wake. You see, Loki is the master of illusions and guises and he can change his appearance on a whim, which is what eventually led to the births of his three children Hel, Fenrir and Jormungand. Hel, as you know, was to become the goddess of the underworld, but Fenrir was too much of a threat to be left unbound and was not granted the same freedoms as his sister. He was banished somewhere unknown in the nine realms, but there have been murmurs of his concealed whereabouts floating on the winds. It seems that someone has gone and freed him, and I'm having a hard time believing that the culprit was anyone other than Loki himself."

"The problem is in the politics I'm afraid; despite his _j  tunn_ blood, Loki is still considered as one of the _Aesir_ because of his vast powers and divine parentage. So long as he is one of them, there is nothing the other gods are willing to do to defy him for fear of their own well beings. But, I fear the rushing tides may be changing in the upper worlds, and it's all because of the little Midgardian and his dragon that destroyed the Red Death. It seems no matter what you do, Hiccup Stoickson, you still manage to start a revolution everywhere you go."

"But he didn't mean to."

Astrid's voice cracked in the humid spring air, spurring Gothi from her monologue, "Hiccup didn't go looking to kill Jormungand," Astrid said, crossing her arms, "The serpent hunted him!"

"I'm afraid it's not that simple," The elder replied, shaking her head solemnly, "Had Hiccup not left Berk for the Western seas, Jormungand never would have found its prey to hunt."

"But doesn't the fact that it's dead mean something?" Astrid urged earnestly, "We killed a monster that's been killing innocent people for centuries! Doesn't that count for something?"

"Every action â€" no matter how noble â€" has a reaction daughter, and the slaying of a demi-god requires a price paid. You're both responsible for killing the son of one of the _Aesir _now, and if it had been any other god, you would have already been struck right out of the skies. Luckily for the two of you, however, it seems that you may have made some allies in high places."

Hiccup and Astrid exchanged a knowing glance, remembering with frightening clarity when that bolt of lightning had spurted from the depths of the thunder clouds, delivering the final blow to their serpentine nemesis.

"There's no guarantee that they'll be your supporters for long, mind you. The gods are known to be fickle with their friends in one's time of need and can pass judgement on a moment's notice," she sighed as her frustration ebbed away, "I'm too old for this, you know..."

"What are we supposed to do?" Astrid said, hoping the fear she was feeling wouldn't seep into her words.

"What you two seem to do best," The Elder said, leaving the two in silence.

* * *

><p>Astrid stormed into her bedroom, furious at her mother for embarrassing her yet again in the middle of the village square. She had told her mother that she had been visiting her great aunt and the stupid woman hadn't even cared and all Astrid wanted to do now was slash a hole into the bedroom wall with her axe and jump out and then burn their barn down for good measure. She was so sick of being without her dragon and every time one of her siblings hopped onto their own dragons, Astrid was tempted to sic her dagger into someone's neck. She was just so angry and confused and upset and all she wanted to do was kill someone.

She didn't want to be alone.

_No! _

She didn't need anyone's support! She didn't need anyone to care for her, or annoy her, or ask her if she was feeling alright. And she didn't even know why she kept meeting with Hiccup every morning when all he did was remind her of the freedom she so desperately missed. He still had his dragon â€" he didn't know what it was like to lose his companion! Astrid slammed the heel against the wall beside her bed, sending splinters flying everywhere as one of the interior planes of wood broke in two.

She could hear her mother screaming at her from downstairs about how she would pay dearly if she kept breaking things, and at that point

Astrid realized what she needed to do. She was done playing the dutiful daughter. She didn't care anymore if she was the eldest, the pride of her family. She'd already broken a hundred rules, experienced a hundred taboos. She didn't give a gronkle's ass about anything to do with her stupid, uptight family and their stupid, uptight traditions.

She'd already helped change their traditions once and she'd be damned if she wasn't going to keep going.

Throwing the shutters open, Astrid stuffed a bag full of some of her belongings and leapt out the window, landing on the ground with a somersault. She clambered to her feet and ran as fast as they would take her, taking off between an alleyway behind her backyard. She bee-lined it for farmer Ållsson's wheat fields and cut across the spring crop into the forest where she hoped she could just get away for a little while.

She didn't know what forces drove her as she trampled through the forest, kicking through bur patches and wild raspberry bushes with vehemence each time. She wanted to get as far away as possible from the village, somewhere where absolutely no one would think to find her, although she knew she would be found eventually (everyone had a stupid dragon now, except for her) but she wanted to make it as difficult as possible for everyone in hopes that maybe they would feel just as bad as she felt then.

The sun was going down as she stumbled across a rocky pass, tripping on some loose stones. She'd been walking briskly for three or four hours by this point and she was quickly losing daylight and the chance to find a decent place to rest. Bracing herself for another steep climb up the mountain face, Astrid wanted to make sure no one on foot would find her; there had to be a cave up there somewhere, and just as the sun began to dip below the horizon, she found her new temporary home.

Exhaustion was heavy in her limbs as she hacked at the trunk of a tree growing off of the side of the cliff. She hauled it inside of the cave and started chopping at the branches violently, bellowing every time her axe made contact with the wood. Her mind was slowly trickling back to that old state of one track concentration and she revelled in the feeling, smiling as if the weight that had been resting on her shoulders was finally being released. No more thinking, no more dwelling, no more revolution. It was just her, her axe and her will to survive.

Lighting the fire, she waited for the smoke to find a source of escape. It disappeared up through the cracks of the tall cavern and Astrid hoped it would dissipate before emerging so that no one could track her visually that way. With a tired sigh, Astrid pulled a woolen blanket from her bag and wrapped herself in it before scooting closer to the fire.

For hours she sat there, her eyes glazed over, expression blank. She refused to think of anything, choosing to stare at the fire instead. When it slowly died down, she stared at the embers and shivered until she was lost in complete darkness. When her teeth started chattering so hard she thought she would bite her own tongue off, she groaned and rose from the hard stone floor to get more firewood, throwing the haphazardly hewn logs onto the fresh ashes. It was only then that she

heard something rustle from behind her, and spurring her leaden limbs into action, Astrid grabbed her axe and charged.

"YEAAAAAAA!" she screamed, launching herself into the darkness outside the cave. She tackled the first thing that moved to the ground, straddling and throttling it with her bare hands clenched tightly around its throat. It struggled for a moment, flailing as she cut off its air supply before something hard clanged her in the back of the head, sending her sprawling sideways. The human (she'd deduced by this point) rolled away from her and started coughing forcefully, gasping for breath.

It started to try and speak but Astrid was too far gone to listen to the tiny voice of reason that pleaded with her to think before she acted. Shaking the stars from her eyes, Astrid leapt to her feet and swung her axe over her head, leaping again for the crouched creature that easily gave its location away with its wheezing. It ducked just in time and she fell up short, her pristine blade slamming into the stone with a painful clang. The jarring from the impact stunned her just long enough for the human to leap to its feet and run in the opposite direction, disappearing into the night.

Astrid stopped to catch her breath, scanning the darkness. She hated the dark, and she hated being blind even more. She couldn't sense any movement but she could hear its breathing somewhere, still struggling to recover from its near asphyxiation. She gripped her axe like a vice as she spun around in a circle, trying to detect any sort of movement in the darkness. Where was it hiding? Why was it waiting? Why wouldn't it just attack already?"

Astrid lost her footing as her legs were taken out from under her, sending her sprawling onto her stomach. Before she could react, something had pinned her body to the ground that kept her from moving and she shrieked with frustration, kicking and squirming as violently as she could. She was pushed down even harder as a result and the way her ribcage was being crushed ruthlessly into the sharp rocks finally made her pause.

There was no mistaking his voice this time as he rasped, still coughing as he choked on his words, "Astrid, it's me."

She stiffened, "Hiccup?"

He rolled off of her and landed with a thud. In the darkness, she could hear him as he rubbed his bruising neck with his hands, "Yeah. Remind me not to sneak up on you in the dark."

His tone was decidedly snarky but the pained rasping that accompanied his comment affected her more. She pulled herself into a sitting position and scuttled backwards, too horrified at what she had almost done to reply to him. That knee jerk reaction, the one she expected to flood her senses and send her reeling, never came. That ignorant bliss of senselessness, of instinct without philosophy, was crushed with blinding intensity as all of her thoughts, her feeling and her consciousness rushed back into her. She'd felt his life flicker beneath her fingers, felt it panic, choke, fade away.

Stunned into silence, Astrid gathered her limbs around her and started to sob.

* * *

><p>She didn't notice anything as Hiccup pulled himself to his feet and left, only to return a few minutes later with an arm full of hewn wood that he dropped gingerly in front of her. She didn't see a thing as Toothless lit the little pile with his flame, engulfing the three of them in firelight. Hiccup leant back against his dragon's withers and stared blatantly as Astrid's shoulders heaved unsteadily, desperately wondering what he was supposed to do.<p>

Astrid was an explosion waiting to happen " they knew that " but he had never expected her to break down in front of him like this. Then again, he had never expected her to try and wring his neck either, so he supposed this night was becoming full of new experiences. He was afraid to go near her for fear of getting the life throttled out of him again but he couldn't just leave her sitting there crying, especially knowing that he was somewhat responsible for her distress.

Leaving the safety of his dragon's side, Hiccup sat down beside her and stared into the fire, losing himself in the flames. He inched closer until they were mere centimeters apart and waited patiently until she stopped heaving so intensely before trying to speak with her.

"I do know what it's like you know," he began, his voice still gravely as his throat tried to recover, "to lose something important."

He waited on baited breath for some sort of angry rebuttal and when she didn't say a word for a while, Hiccup decided to continue, "When my father disowned me and took Toothless, I didn't know what to do with myself. All I could do was watch as my life as I knew it was well, completely destroyed. I knew I would be cast away and left on a deserted island all alone to die for treason and I knew that when my father finally found the island, he would kill Toothless and I would never see him again. All I could do was watch there was nothing that I thought I could do but watch."

"Then you came along and finally talked some sense into me, and it was then that I knew what I had to do. I had to act, I had to do something I couldn't just stand there anymore, and then we ended up working together and we saved _thousands_ _of lives_ Astrid," Hiccup turned to her, staring through the bare skin that was hiding her eyes, "What I'm trying to say is, you don't have to do this alone. Like your great aunt said, you got yourself involved the minute you left Berk to come after me. We're in this together, for the long haul. I can't face this without you, even if you don't believe me."

He watched her take a shaky breath beneath her folded arms and Hiccup couldn't help but reach out and ghost the pads of his fingers along her back. She flinched, but she didn't move away from him and Hiccup breathed a sigh of relief. He was at a loss on how to deal with her " he'd grown up in a male dominated household, after all " so he took the lack of violence as a good sign.

They sat there in silence for what seemed like hours as Hiccup continued to stroke her back with his thumb, and eventually she gave up trying and leant towards him for support. He wrapped his arm

around her as she buried herself in his side, still fighting for her composure and failing miserably. Hiccup caught Toothless' stare from across the fire and grimaced; the dragon didn't have any solutions for him either.

Hiccup waited until her breaths had evened out before chancing any attempt at moving her. He shifted out from under her as gently as he could and got to one knee, scooping her up to his chest in his arms. Hiccup stood without too much trouble on his part and hobbled into the cave that he'd found her in, glancing around for her blanket. The fire had almost burned out and Hiccup had trouble finding the mantle in the dim light, but he eventually uncovered it and wrapped her up with it in hopes that she would stop shivering. Toothless nudged the rest of the wood into the pile of ashes and lit it with a spark before curling up behind them just close enough so that they could rest upon his flank. Thanking him silently, Hiccup pulled Astrid against him and lied back beneath his dragon's wing, and slowly fell asleep.

* * *

><p>Hiccup woke up just as the sun's rays began to stain the horizon. He was cold and aching and his throat still hurt like Hel, but the odd wave of nostalgia that crashed over him drowned it all out. Turning his head, he glanced down at Astrid and smiled slightly as she slowly began to wake herself, nuzzling her face into the crook of his neck to keep out the sun. It had been ten days of walking on eggshells and Hiccup knew that he'd finally broken the wall down between them, if only just a little. She had to understand that she didn't have to go through this alone, this guilt, this anger, this grief. He'd realized already that there was no use trying to do something this monumental on your own; there was no room for martyrdom in the real world, especially when the entire village of Berk relied on them now. And who knew, maybe their entire civilization was at stake once again.<p>

He'd started this mess, and he wasn't afraid to admit that he couldn't clean it up on his own.

The storm was edging closer, he knew that. Toothless threw him a sidelong glance, his green eyes sensing the worry in his own; they didn't know what was coming or even how much time they'd have left to prepare. He knew he would have to organize the villagers though, if only to let them know that they were going to have one Hel of a fight coming their way and it wasn't going to be easy. Vikings seldom backed down from a fight, and Hiccup was confident that they would be able to hold up on their own, but that wasn't what he was worried about.

Astrid grumbled something into the hollow of his collar bone, stirring him out of his thoughts. He turned his head back towards her and smiled as she cracked open her eye lids, blinking rapidly as the sun crawled from its resting place beyond the distant shores. He gave her a moment to get her bearings before wishing her good morning and was stunned as she smiled back up at him for the first time since they'd come home. _'I could get used to this'_ , he thought, brushing an errant strand of hair behind her ear.

She'd lost her headband some time ago and never replaced it, and Hiccup couldn't help but think about what it meant. She'd been

wearing a _kransen_ for years and seemed quite attached to it; after all, it was a symbol of being an unmarried women and Astrid had always boasted of her intentions of being a shield maiden. It was tradition, something that Astrid had taken very seriously up until quite recently.

'_To Hel with tradition'_, he smiled as he kissed her on the forehead.

She cracked her back and yawned before settling back in her previous position, "Gods, I'm sore."

"Me too. How's your head?"

She reached up and rubbed it carefully, wincing slightly when her fingers nudged the bump on the back of her skull, "Hurts. What did you hit me with?"

Hiccup smirked and straightened his left leg out in front of him, "Turns out this thing makes a great weapon when you're being strangled."

"I'm sorry Hiccup," she whispered, eyeing the visible damage around his neck, "I don't know what got into me."

"Don't worry about it," he replied just as quietly, turning her chin up to face him, "I'll know better next time not to sneak up on you."

"Stillâ€|there's no excuse for me trying to kill you."

"Let's just call it even then, shall we?"

"What?"

Hiccup flexed his fingers, stroking the bared skin near her hip with his thumb, "I almost got you killed just for being involved in this mess. For all I know, we might not make it through the week. The least you could have done was repay the favour."

She paid him back for his weak attempt at humour with a soft punch to the leg, to which Hiccup cried out in mock pain and surrendered. She grinned and settled back into his embrace, unwilling to go back to reality.

"How are we going to do this?" she asked, voicing the concerns she'd been stifling since the storm first appeared to be following them months ago.

"The way we've always done it."

Astrid raised a puzzled eyebrow, "And what way is that exactly?"

"The way we do best," he reached down and grabbed her hand, entwining his fingers in hers.

"Together."

* * *

><p>Phew! That was huge! I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it! And I hope to hear what you have to say in the form of reviews!<p>

There was a lot of information packed into this chapter, and it doesn't help that Marvel picked the same villain as me to headline their cinematic Avengers universe (I started my saga in octobre 2010, by the way, which was seven months before Thor hit the theatres, so I in no way stole the idea from them). To clarify: Marvel mythology is not the real Norse mythology; it's just a very elaborate play on it, like a mythological fan fiction per se. As I pointed out, Laufey is his mum, not his dad and Thor and Loki certainly did not grow up together. In Norse mythology, Loki slept with everyone, even some animals. For my own plot, I left out that Loki actually had another offspring names Sleipnir, who is an eight legged horse. But for the most part, I remained tried and true to those crazy Norse fables and I hope that you guys learned a thing or two while you were reading.

By the way, is anyone else totally weirded out by the new format? Book covers? Really?

Lastly, I just want to thank those of you who favourited/alerted/reviewed ****Rising Sun****. It was flattering to know that there are people still out there excited to read what I have to write and I hope to hear from you all again now. If I get enough reviews on this story (say...in the double digits), I'll post another chapter about a week from now stating the title and the publishing date. If not, ****The Horizons Saga**** will probably ride off into the sunset, or rather, the horizon.

BrontÃ«

End
file.